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ABSTRACT

Although research has provided evidence to document a relation between parental psychopathology and female delinquency, the dimensions of that relationship are unclear. Adjudicated delinquent females (N=48) completed a general social history interview and three psychological instruments. Probation records were used to analyze subjects' delinquent offense patterns and to obtain data on parents (history of drug/alcohol abuse, adult criminal record, treatment for psychiatric disorders). Results revealed four personality patterns among the girls: borderline, antisocial, neurotic, and socialized delinquents. Subjects with antisocial personalities were significantly more likely to have fathers with a record of psychiatric treatment than girls in the other three groups; they were also more likely to have fathers who were alcoholics and substance abusers than girls with neurotic or borderline personalities. No index of maternal psychopathology was found to be significantly related to female delinquent personality patterns. All three measures of paternal psychopathology were significantly related to higher total delinquency scores in subjects. Only one measure of maternal psychopathology, a record of psychiatric treatment, was positively associated with an earlier age at first offense in girls, but not to any other index of offense. The results suggest that children reared by psychologically disturbed parents are "at risk" for the development of a wide range of behavior disorders. (Author/NRB)

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PARENTAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY AND FEMALE DELINQUENCY*

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PARENTAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY AND FEMALE DELINQUENCY

Introduction

Parental psychopathology has been associated with female delinquency in a number of studies, most of which are based on the analysis of female delinquents' case records from mental health clinics, juvenile courts, or residential treatment programs. Pioneering work by Jenkins and his associates (1966, 1968) in their cluster analysis of case records of a child guidance clinic established a relationship between parental pathology and delinquent behavior types, i.e., histories of alcoholism and delinquency among fathers of socialized delinquents and unsocialized aggressive delinquents. While mothers of socialized delinquents were more prone to delinquency and promiscuity, mothers of unsocialized aggressive delinquents were more likely to have a character disturbance or neurotic disorder. In their large-scale samples, paternal pathology was significantly greater than maternal pathology for both male and female socialized delinquents.

Although subsequent studies have not attempted to establish a relationship between indices of parental pathology and specific behavioral syndromes among delinquents, they have consistently documented a variety of psychological disorders among the parents of delinquents (Fine and Fishman, 1968; Lewis and Balla, 1976; Luckianowicz, 1971; Cortes and Gatti, 1972). In addition to relatively high rates of psychiatric disorder among the parents of delinquents, parental characterological disorders, alcoholism and criminality have been noted for female delinquents in a number of studies (Bennett, 1959; Reiner and Kaufman, 1959; Scharfman and Clark, 1967; Chwast, 1967; Trese, 1962; Stephenson, et al., 1973).

Lewis and Balla (1976) found that 72% of the parents of their sample of clinic-referred juvenile delinquents were " ... impaired or incapacitated in their parental roles by virtue of significant psychopathology" (p. 143). In an epidemiological survey comparing parents of delinquents to a random sample of parents from a comparable social stratum, these authors found that parents of delinquents used community psychiatric facilities significantly more frequently than the contrast group of parents.

Thus, there is ample evidence to document a relation between parental psychopathology and female delinquency. However, the dimensions of that relationship are still unclear, particularly in terms of the effects of specific indices of parental pathology on different types of female delinquents and on different patterns of delinquent offenses. As the incidence and severity of female delinquency increases, it seems especially appropriate to pursue the line of investigation initiated by Jenkins (1961, 1968) in his attempt to relate specific pathological parental behaviors to specific delinquent behavioral syndromes.

Purpose of Current Study

This paper reports the results of one aspect of a larger study of the personality patterns of delinquent females (Gibbs, 1980). Two of the related goals of that study were: 1) to determine the relation between parental psychopathology and female delinquent personality patterns and, 2) to determine the relation between parental psychopathology and offense patterns of female delinquents.

Methodology

A sample of 48 adjudicated delinquent females was obtained from a suburban

San Francisco county probation department through continuous sampling of the total population of delinquents in the system during a period of seven months.

Personality patterns were measured through the administration of a general social history interview and three psychological instruments, e.g., the Diagnostic Interview For Borderlines (Gunderson, 1977), the Rorschach, and the WAIS or WISC-R. Procedures used to identify these patterns were fully described in an earlier publication (Gibbs, 1980).

Probation records were used to analyze subjects' delinquent offense patterns, which were measured in four ways: 1) age at first offense, 2)total number of offenses, 3) total delinquency score, i.e., the number of offenses weighted by the severity of each offense, and 4) average delinquency score, i.e., the total delinquency score divided by the total number of offenses.

Data on parents were obtained from the subjects' probation records. Three measures were used to assess parental psychopathology, e.g., history of drug/alcohol abuse, an adult criminal record, and treatment for any psychiatric disorder. Each parent was rated for the presence or absence of each of these indicators; no scale of frequency or severity was utilized.

A contingency analysis, using Kendall's Tau B, was used to determine the relation between measures of parental psychopathology and female delinquent personality types, as well as the relation between parental psychopathology and female delinquent offense patterns.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

The sample consisted of 29 white, 11 Hispanic, and 8 Black subjects. Socioeconomically, 27% were middle class, 54% working class, and 19% lower class, using

the Hollingshead 2-Factor Index of Social Class (cf. Table I). The subjects ranged from 13-18 years of age, with a mean age of 15.3. Their median grade in school was 10.5, but 44% of the group were not currently enrolled in school due to having dropped out, been expelled or suspended, or graduated.

Sixty percent of the parents of these delinquents were divorced, or separated and 13% were widowed or never married; only 27% of the marriages were intact. Their mothers had an average level of education slightly higher than their fathers, with 42% having completed high school as compared to 40% of the fathers. Nearly seventy percent of the mothers were employed, primarily in clerical, sales and semi-skilled occupations; about 80% of the fathers were employed, with half of this group in skilled and semi-skilled jobs. While adequate demographic information was available for all the mothers of the subjects, this was true for only 38 of the fathers. Thus, data for 10 of the fathers was incomplete because they were no longer in contact with their families, were unknown to the subjects, or were deceased.

High rates of geographic and residential mobility characterized these families, e.g., they had lived in an average of 3.8 communities and an average of 4.2 residences since the birth of the index child.

Delinquent Personality Patterns

An analysis of the test profiles revealed four personality patterns among the subjects, i.e., the borderline (N=7), the antisocial (N=14), the neurotic (N=18),and the socialized delinquent (N=9).

Borderline personalities exhibited impaired cognitive processes on psychological tests; they had experienced brief psychotic symptoms and/or polymorphous neurotic and psychosomatic symptoms; their affect was considerably more angry,

depressed, and labile than girls in the other three groups; and signs of serious psychological disorder had appeared much earlier in their development according to reports from parents and teachers. Collectively, these clinical patterns and behaviors are consistent with the profile of the borderline personality in adolescence as described by Masterson (1972) and Rinsley (1974).

Neurotic personalities exhibited more frequent signs of anxiety, mild to moderate depression, crying, fears, phobias, and psychosomatic disorders. They were perceived by parents and teachers as immature, troubled, and erratic in their school performance, but not viewed as seriously disturbed. These behavioral and clinical patterns closely conform to the profile of the neurotic delinquent personality as described by Bennett (1960), Jenkins,(1961)and Stephenson, et al. (1973).

Antisocial personalities were characterized by their high levels of impulsivity, aggressiveness, hostility to adults and authority figures, and general defiance of established social norms. The onset of their antisocial behaviors was noted in elementary school by parents and teachers and they tended to engage more frequently than the other three groups in socially deviant behaviors, such as heavy involvement in drugs, alcohol and sexual promiscuity. These behavioral and clinical patterns are quite similar to those associated with the anti-social or sociopathic delinquent as described by Fine and Fishman (1968) and Bender (1971).

Socialized delinquent personalities showed fewer signs of psychopathology on the psychological tests than any of the other groups. As a group these girls tended to be moderately impulsive, lacked interest in school, were involved with delinquent friends, and moderately involved in drug and alcohol abuse. They

depressed, and labile than girls in the other three groups; and signs of serious psychological disorder had appeared much earlier in their development according to reports from parents and teachers. Collectively, these clinical patterns and behaviors are consistent with the profile of the borderline personality in adolescence as described by Masterson (1972) and Rinsley (1974).

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Socialized delinquent personalities showed fewer signs of psychopathology on the psychological tests than any of the other groups. As a group these girls tended to be moderately impulsive, lacked interest in school, were involved with delinquent friends, and moderately involved in drug and alcohol abuse. They

were described by parents and teachers as sometimes hostile and aggressive, but they had no difficulties relating to their peers. These behavioral and clinical patterns are quite similar to those associated with the socialized sub-cultural delinquent as described by Jenkins (1961) and Stephenson, et al., (1973).

Thus, these four delinquent personality types represent a continuum of psychological functioning from the relatively poorly integrated borderline personality pattern to the relatively well-integrated socialized sub-cultural personality pattern.

Parental Psychopathology and Delinquent Personality Patterns

Twenty-four percent of the parents of these subjects had received outpatient treatment and/or hospitalization for a psychiatric disorder. Among the parents of these girls, 28% of the fathers and 21% of the mothers had received psychiatric treatment and/or hospitalization.

Drug and alcohol abuse were reported for 42% of the fathers and 15% of the mothers. Fifteen percent of the fathers had adult criminal records, but this was true for only one mother (2%).

When the relationship between the three measures of maternal and paternal psychopathology and female delinquent personality patterns was analyzed, several significant relations were discovered (cf. Table IV). First, subjects with antisocial personalities were significantly more likely to have fathers with a record of psychiatric treatment than girls in the other three groups.

Second, subjects with anti-social personalities were significantly more likely to have fathers with a psychiatric diagnosis of personality disorder; however, socialized delinquents were equally as likely as antisocial subjects to have fathers with drug or alcohol problems.

There were no significant relationships between indices of maternal psychopathology and female delinquent personality patterns.

Parental Psychopathology and Delinquent Offense Patterns

A contingency analysis of the relationship between indices of parental psychopathology and delinquent offense patterns among these subjects revealed several significant effects.

In terms of paternal psychopathology, girls whose fathers had a record of psychiatric treatment had total delinquency scores that were significantly higher than girls with non-treated father (Tau=.36, $p < .01$). The total delinquency scores of girls whose fathers had a record of alcohol or drug abuse were also significantly higher than those with non-addicted fathers (Tau=.34, $p. < 01$). This result was also true of girls whose fathers had adult criminal records as compared to girls with non-criminal fathers (Tau=.34, $p. < 01$). Thus, all three measures of paternal psychopathology were significantly associated with the tendency of female delinquents to commit more severe offenses such as burglaries and assaults.

The only index of maternal psychopathology which was significantly related to female delinquent offense patterns was that girls whose mothers had a record of psychiatric treatment had an earlier age at first offense than girls with non-treated mothers ($\chi^2 = 17.31$, $p < .01$). Girls whose mothers had a history of drug or alcohol abuse tended to have higher average delinquency scores than girls with non-addicted mothers, but this difference did not quite reach an acceptable level of significance ($\chi^2 = 21.36$, $p = .06$).

Summary and Discussion

In this study of a multi-ethnic sample of delinquent females, four personality patterns were identified, i.e., the borderline, the antisocial, the neurotic and the socialized delinquent.

It was found that subjects with antisocial personalities were significantly more likely to have fathers with a record of psychiatric treatment than girls in the other three groups; they were also more likely to have fathers who were alcoholics and substance abusers than girls with neurotic or borderline personalities. No index of material psychopathology was found to be significantly related to female delinquent personality patterns.

All three measures of paternal psychopathology were found to be significantly related to higher total delinquency scores in these subjects. However, only one measure of maternal psychopathology, i.e., a record of psychiatric treatment, was positively associated with an earlier age at first offense in this group, but not to any other index of offense. In contrast, Lewis and Balla (1976) found that a record of parental criminality was the only index of pathology which was significantly related to any measure of delinquent behavior, i.e., delinquents with parents who had criminal records committed their first offenses at a significantly earlier age than delinquents with non-criminal parents.

In this study, paternal psychopathology was found to be more significantly related both to personality patterns and to offense patterns of female delinquents than maternal psychopathology. While this finding parallels the results of a few previous studies relating parental psychopathology to behavior and personality patterns of delinquents, it still raises some interesting issues (cf. Jenkins, 1961; El-Guebaly, et al., 1978; Trese, 1962; Scharfman and Clark, 1967; Fine and Fishman, 1968).

The fact that fathers of girls with antisocial personalities were significantly more likely to have been substance abusers and to have been psychiatrically-treated than fathers of girls in the other three groups challenges some of the assumptions in the developmental literature about the relative impact of fathers on the personality development of children. Since the traditional child-development literature focuses primarily on the importance of the mother-child relationship in the development of personality and psychopathology, one would probably predict that maternal psychopathology would have a more significant relationship to adolescent female personality patterns than paternal psychopathology. One interpretation of the current finding, which does not bear out such a prediction, is that the presence of a father with severe psychological problems and/or antisocial behaviors (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse) contributes disproportionately to faulty socialization in female children and fosters the development of the super-ego lacunae which Johnson and Szurek (1952) have described in the delinquent personality structure, which is one of the distinguishing features of the antisocial personality. From a social-learning perspective, one could attribute the development of the antisocial personality in these subjects to their tendency to model their behaviors after their fathers (whether they are present or absent in the family), particularly in view of the early onset of their involvement in the use of drugs, alcohol and their early patterns of sexual promiscuity, assaultiveness and defiance to adult authority. Even when fathers are absent, unreliable or inconsistent in their parental roles, which was the case for the majority of these subjects, the family culture incorporates their past and current behaviors and values, and they are frequently projected as negative role models to their children. Thus, in the case of emotionally vulnerable girls, a negative identification with their fathers might form the basis for the development of later delinquent behaviors.

The relation between maternal psychiatric problems and earlier age of onset of delinquent behaviors may reflect the fact that a disturbed mother may be psychologically unavailable to her daughter during the very crucial developmental stage of early adolescence. Perceptions of their mothers as withdrawn or non-supportive around issues of emerging sexuality and feminine identity may lead them to seek substitute peer group relationships in which their frustrated dependency needs are denied and are displaced by anti-social behaviors such as drug abuse, vandalism and sexual promiscuity.

This interpretation is supported both by the subjects' reports of maternal depression in this study, as well as observed relationships between maternal depression and female delinquency in other recent studies (Gibbs, 1981 (in press); Chiles, et al., 1980; Weissman and Siegel, 1972).

While these results are based on a small sample of delinquent females, they point to the need for further studies of a wide range of delinquent samples, both male and female, to determine the relative contribution of maternal and paternal psychopathology to delinquent personality types and behaviors. A more differentiated understanding of the interaction among parental psychopathology, family dynamics and female delinquency, will presumably lead to more effective diagnostic assessment and treatment of delinquent females and their families.

Finally, it has become increasingly clear from the pioneering work of Rutter and his associates (1966) that children and adolescents reared by psychologically disturbed parents are "at risk" for the development of a wide range of behavior disorders. Early identification of families where one or both parents are psychiatrically impaired is an important mental health strategy in terms of early intervention and potential prevention of serious disorder among children and adolescents.

TABLE XV

PERSONALITY PATTERNS AND PATERNAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Personality Pattern	Psychiatric Treatment (1)	Drug/Alcohol Abuse (2)	Criminal Record (3)
Borderline	-	1 (.14)	-
Antisocial	6 (.46)	9 (.67)	2 (.18)
Neurotic	3 (.20)	6 (.35)	3 (.18)
Socialized Delinquent	2 (.33)	4 (.67)	2 (.40)
Column Total	11	20	7

(1) Kendall's Tau B = -.336, P .01

(2) Chi-Square = 7.45, 3 d.f.; p .05

(3) Not significant.

*Percentages represent the proportion of girls in each group whose fathers had a record of any index of psychopathology. The base rate thus varies with each category; e.g., the number of fathers is not constant.

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